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The
REDEMPTION
of
Marie Gordon
THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD
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"I am sorry you dislike me," he said. "Yet, I want to see you happy. Mrs. Forster suggested that I get a companion for you."

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DORA found her lover, Gerald Halcombe was already at the trysting place. "Thank God, Dora, that you have come!" he said fervently, as he clasped her in his arms. And then he told her why he had been so urgent to bring about this interview.

Her experience of the previous night, followed by Jane's dismissal, had been quite sufficient to convince her of the danger she ran by remaining under the same roof with Morris Hope, and it did not now require very much persuasion on Gerald's part to induce her to fall in with his plans.

The result was that when they separated, half an hour later, it had been arranged that Dora should steal out of the house when night came, and hasten to an appointed spot, where her lover would be waiting with a car.

The rest of the day passed by most tediously to Dora. She both longed and dreaded for the night to come.

She sought to keep aloof as much as possible from her guardian, but it was impossible altogether to avoid him, and whenever they met she was most unpleasantly impressd by his manner towards her.

More than once she caught him looking at her in a way that made her shudder. She began to experience a nervous dread as to the success of the step she had planned with her lover to take.

But as the time for action drew near her courage revived and her resolution strengthened.

After dinner she pleaded a headache, and announced her intention of retiring to her room. Morris Hope was looking straight at her as she spoke, and she saw just the flickering of a smile about his mouth. It made her feel decidedly uncomfortable.

"Certainly, my dear," he said. "By all means seek your bed and——" he paused for a moment, then he added, "stay there."

It was a singular thing to say, and Dōra, as she made her way to her room, felt more uneasy than ever.

She could not rid herself of a disquieting notion that her guardian was not altogether ignorant of the step she contemplated taking. The die was cast, however. There must be no drawing back now.

It did not take long to complete her preparations. Warmly clad in her outdoor garments, and with a hooded cloak shrouding her form, she cautiously opened the door of her room and looked keenly from right to left.

No one was visible. Her next proceeding was to creep down the stairs and make her way to a side door that was rarely used. This she accomplished in safety, and in another moment was out in the open air.

The night favored her design, inasmuch as it was dark. The sky was clouded over, and the wind, which had been rising all the afternoon, was now almost a gale.

With wildly-beating heart Dora hastened down the garden path and out into the road along which she sped as fast as the buffeting wind would permit.

She reached the rendezvous in safety, and found the automobile awaiting her. A tall form, cloaked, and with a wide-brimmed soft felt hat pulled well over the eyes, was just discernible through the gloom, standing at the door.

He opened the door the moment she appeared and held it open for her. Just then there was a lull in the battle the wind had for so long been waging.

"Quick!" he said, in a whisper. "We have not a moment to lose. The enemy is on our track!"

He assisted her into the car and swiftly closed the door.

"Why, where is Jane?" she exclaimed, finding she was the only occupant of the vehicle. He made no reply, but opening the front door, drove off.

Dora was a little puzzled by the turn affairs were taking She could not understand Jane's absence, when it had been so clearly understood that she was to share the drive with her. She was still puzzling over the matter when suddenly the car stopped and the door was flung open.

"What is the matter, Gerald?" she said. "We surely have not arrived at the station yet. And—why, what is this? You have brought me back to Dene Lodge!"

A hand seized her wrist with almost brutal force, and she was dragged out of the car.

"Ha, ha! my pretty flyaway!" laughed a mocking voice, in which she at once detected the hated tones of her guardian. "You thought to escape me, did you? How little you know Morris Hope, even now, to attempt such folly. Your lover, Dora, is outmatched by me. He has measured his strength and his cunning against mine, and he has failed, as he ever will. In every contest between us I shall be the victor."

She strove to reply, to lash him for his baseness with the fury of her tongue, but the strain upon her overwrought nerves had been too much for their endurance, and tottering forward she sank fainting into the arms of the man who had so cruelly deceived her and whom she so bitterly hated.

What, meanwhile, had become of Gerald Halcombe?

Just before it was time for him to set out for the rendezvous he and Dora had agreed upon, one of the Dene Lodge maids had brought him a note, which she said, Miss Clyde had begged her secretly to convey to

him. It was to the effect that Dora feared her guardian had got wind of the projected elopement, and that consequently she thought it best not to run the risk the attempt would entail.

Gerald would, therefore, have to go to the Continent without her after all. But he was not to worry on her account. She would be brave and keep her guardian at a distance, and when her lover returned to England she would come to him.

Gerald was bitterly disappointed, but there clearly was nothing for him to do now save hasten to the bedside of his stricken father without further delay.

And hither he went with a heavy heart, leaving the equally dejected Jane installed in his home as a sort of housekeeper, and little dreaming that hope-shattering letter was a cunning forgery from the hand of Morris Hope, and that the maid who had delivered it had been bribed thus to aid him in the bold bid he was making for victory.

The young doctor was well on his way south when consciousness returned Dora. She found herself lying on the couch in the drawing-room, with her guardian in attendance upon her.

"Thank Heaven you have come back to life at last, my darling!" he exclaimed, in one of those curious changes of mood that were so characteristic of him. "I began to fear the worst." Dora struggled to a sitting posture, her hand pressed to her brow.

For a moment she could not recall what had happened, but it speedily all came back to her, and with a cry of bitterest anguish she pushed her guardian away and started to her feet.

"You must not think too harshly of me, Dora," he said. "What I have done has been for your own good, as you yourself will some day admit. I overheard what

passed between you and Gerald Halcombe. I followed you to the place of tryst and hid myself there.

"Not a very honorable proceeding, you will say; but it was one of those cases where the end justifies the means. Then I put your lover off the scent—it does not matter how—and took his place myself. A little theatrical, perhaps, but effective, as showing you the extent of my resources, and the unbending resolution of my will."

Dora said not a word. One look she gave him, one scathing glance of scorn, and then, turning her back upon him, swept out of the room and went to her own.

The following morning broke bright and clear. There was little in it to suggest the storm of human passions that, like the wind, had raged the night before.

Dora took her meals in her room that day, complaining of indisposition, and for several days following.

Morris was silent, telling himself she might sulk as long as she liked, but all the same he missed her presence in the long evenings.

At last, heartily tired of his own society, he sent out invitations for a dinner, and sent a note to Dora bidding her be prepared to receive his guests with her usual winsome grace of manner.

The note was kindly worded, and Dora was indeed heartily tired of her seclusion.

She had had time to look at her position in all lights, and she saw that nothing but discomfort could be gained by keeping up hostilities with her guardian. who could control her life as he pleased for the next three years.

So she did his bidding with cool graciousness, infinitely bewitching in its pretty air of pride and dignity.

The night of the dinner-party she appeared in a charming dress of black lace and white flowers.

Morris was proud of her as she sat facing him at

the dinner-table. Many of the guests were friends of her dead father's, and Dora felt comforted by their presence.

Mrs. Forster, the rector's wife, took her aside when the gentlemen were sitting over their wine and said:

"Your guardian is young to have the charge of a girl like you. I hear he has complete control over you until you are of age, and I also hear that his control promises to last your life. Is it true that you are engaged to him?"

"No, no—a thousand times, no; I would not marry him for the world. It is true my father wished it, but then, dear old man, he did not know that Dr. Halcombe had learned to care for me. We are betrothed, and hope, directly I am of age, to be married."

Mrs. Foster patted the girl's trembling hand affectionately as he said:

"I am sorry your engagement with Dr. Halcombe does not meet with your guardian's approval, for I understand it does not by your manner. I presume Mr. Hope would not object to your father's arrangement for you?"

Here the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the gentlemen, and Dora was requested to sing.

Th evening passed pleasantly, so pleasantly indeed that Dora sighed to see the guests depart. Morris heard the sigh, and saw the yearning look in her eyes, and taking her hand in his, he said regretfully:

"Is it so dreadful to be left alone with me, Dora?"

She nodded defiantly, tears were too near for speech.

Morris pressed her hands, then dropped them, saying:

"I am sorry you dislike me so, yet I want to see you happy. Mrs. Forster suggested that I should get a com-

panion for you, someone older and more world-wise. What do you say to the plan. I suppose it is hardly the thing for so young a guardian to live alone with so lovely a ward, without someone here to play propriety. Shall I get a lady to fill this post for us?"

Dora flushed as she said eagerly:

"Oh, please, do. I am sure it would be much better for everyone."

A hope of a possible friend to her cause made her snatch at the proposal so eagerly.

"May I smoke?" asked Morris.

Dora said his doing so could not interfere with her, as she intended to retire at once.

"Don't go yet, child; 'tis quite early, and it is so pleasant to see you sitting there."

Dora sank again into her seat. She did not want to come to an open rupture with him now, and somehow, though she would not confess it to herself, she began to fear his stern, controlling temper.

Morris looked very handsome, lounging by the fire, with a softened light in his cold eyes, a flush on his usually colorless face.

As she looked at him, Dora imagined he was the sort of man to make many a woman love him.

He rose and looked down at her inquiringly, saying in a low voice:

"What are you wondering about, Dora?"

"I was wondering why you never married, Mr. Hope."

Morris threw his cigar into the fire savagely, all the softness dying out of his face as he said, with forced calmness:

"I am not very old, and my life has been too full of work for me to think of marriage. Besides, I was waiting for you, you know."

He put his hands upon her shoulders, and she glanced up at him fleetingly.

The passionate light in his eyes frightened her.

"Don't look like that, Dora. One would think I was a wild beast. You need not fear me; I love you too well to hurt you, and now that I know that fellow Halcombe has left England I feel a little less fiercely jealous."

A week later they were at Brighton. The season was at its height, and Dora was bound to acknowledge that, in spite of her lover's absence and the mistrust she felt for Morris, she was really enjoying the change.

A cousin of Morris's, a young and handsome widow, had accepted the post of companion, and seemed to enjoy it.

Mrs. Langley was an acknowledged votaress of pleasure, a merry, cheerful-hearted creature, who made everyone about her reflect her brightness.

Dora liked her; no one could help liking her. True, she was vain and extremely frivolous, but she was pleasant to live with, as those people always are whose motto is: "Eat, drink, and be merry." She had no thought for the morrow, and, like the lilies of the field, had neither toiled nor spun, yet, like Solomon, was ever attired in all the glory of purple and fine linen.

Her husband, an old man she had married for money, died suddenly and left her but a small annuity.

She was very fond of her handsome, clever cousin Morris, and readily accepted his proposal that she should fill the post of chaperon to the girl he wished her to present to her world.

Dora often scolded herself for feeling so light-hearted while separated from Gerald. She had one long, loving letter from him which she treasured dearly, for it was the outpouring of a great, true heart

He still believed she had voluntarily failed to keep her appointment with him on that memorable evening when she was to have eloped with him; on reflection, she had resolved for the present to tell him nothing of what happened on that occasion.

All must come well some day, she thought, and meanwhile she might as well enjoy life a little.

One lovely morning, when she had been at Brighton about three weeks, she returned from a walk to find Mrs. Langley with a solemn face and her guardian grave, and, if possible, more attentive and considerate than ever.

Dora noticed that the usual paper was not by her guardian's plate, and asked him how he could get through his breakfast without his Times.

"I have read it, dear," he said quietly; "read it and seen something in it that has shocked me horribly. Something that you must see, too, Dora, and may God give you strength to bear it."

Chapter 226

TREACHERY REVEALED

DORA turned very white; it seemed as though an icy hand had clutched her heart. She feared she knew not what, but her thoughts flew at once to Gerald. "What has happened? Pray tell me, Mrs. Langley. I can bear anything better than suspense"

She looked appealingly from one compassionate face to the other.

Morris put his arms around her and said tenderly:

"Dear little girl, much as I resented your love for Dr. Halcombe, I never dreamt it could become the pain to you I know it now must be. Be brave, dear, for you have to bear a great shock, a great sorrow. Heaven knows I would rather have suffered any torture than have seen your life clouded afresh by another death."

"Oh, don't tell me that—I shall go mad! Gerald is not dead. Tell me what sorrow I am called upon to endure. See, I am calm, I am brave, what has happened to my darling."

Morris turned his eyes from that agonized, pleading face, and said hoarsely to Mrs. Langley:

"Tell her, for I cannot."

Mrs. Langley, who detested a scene, felt her heart melted by the girl's entreating voice, and said kindly, in a hurried, nervous way:

"In the death column of the "Times" this morning there is a notice of the sudden decease of Dr. Gerald Halcombe at Lausanne. His age was thirty-three. Catch her. Morris—she has fainted."

Morris placed her on a couch, and Mrs. Langley quickly applied restoratives, but never would she while life lasted forget the horror of the girl's awakening. She raved at Morris, accusing him of the blackest falsehood.

Then Mrs. Langley placed the paper in her hands, and Dora read for herself the horrible report. Not then her despairing eyes could doubt its truth. She grew very quiet, and laid down in a darkened room like one stupefied. A long illness followed, from which she arose but a wreck of her former bonny self.

It was in vain that Morris took her from place to place, and Mrs. Langley showed the sunniest side of her nature.

Nothing could arouse or brighten Dora; her only desire was to be allowed to drop out of life in search of her lover, her dear, dead love whom she mourned as bitterly as if she were his widow.

Morris began to lose all hopes of winning her, till. while traveling in Spain, he was attacked by fever that prostrated him.

His helplessness and need of care appealed to Dora's womanly heart. She roused herself at last, and took her place by the sick man's side, forgetting all but that he was her father's friend and likely to die in a foreign land and surrounded by strangers.

He was very ill, and so quiet and grateful for her care of him. She was so desolate and alone that it was natural her heart should soften towards him.

One day, when he proposed they should go back to England, she shuddered and said:

"Oh, no, do not let us go there yet. I could not bear it."

And Morris knew the old wound pained her still.

"I am grieved to have to refuse you anything, dear," he said. "I think we must return. Mrs. Langley

is tired of travel, and it would hardly seem the thing for you and me to wander about the world alone together, unless, darling, you could persuade yourself to make me happy by becoming my wife.

"Hush! Do not reply hastily. Remember your father wished it, and I love you so dearly. Surely it would not be so very hard to find contentment with me. Your marriage could pain no one, and it would be my salvation. Can't you say 'Yes,' my own?"

But Dora could not say "Yes" then, though, by dint of much persuasion brought to bear upon her with infinite tact, and tenderness, she did say "Yes" in the end, and so forged another link in the chain of her destiny that drew her on to hidden depths of despair.

Once her husband, Morris quickly learned to control her inclination to the right line of duty. She was not happy; all hopes of happiness had died with her first love, whom she still mourned in secret.

Her husband was passionately fond of her, but her deep abjection annoyed him excessively. He grew desperately jealous of her old lover, and often upbraided her by passionate protestations against her coolness to him, but she would take his rebukes silently, only reminding him that he knew she had no love to give when she married him.

Mrs. Langley left them to return to England, and somehow Dora dreaded to be alone with her husband—dreaded it so much that she begged him to return to England also; but this he would not do now, saying he intended to live abroad for at least ten years to come.

Dora made anything but a "crown" to her husband's manhood. Far above rubies Morris knew her worth to be, but he felt he must be ever shut out from the full sweetness of her nature. He grew tired of trying to win back her old brightness, and sighed to know

he should never see her bonnie and gay as in her maidenhood.

One day he surprised her by saying:

"I must go to England, dear, for a little time. There is business I must attend to myself. You can make yourself quite comfortable without me, I know. I will return to you with all possible speed."

"I will go with you, Morris. There are many trifles at home which belonged to my father that I should like to collect and place in safety."

Morris bit his lip savagely as he said:

"I would rather you stayed here. I can bring back anything you want. I intend letting your old home —it's useless for it to remain as it is. I can't sell it, for it is settled on you, you know."

"It will always be home to me, for the sake of the sunny memories it holds of my old happy life with my father."

"And Gerald Halcombe, I suppose?"

Dora paled at his sneering words, but said coldly, with the old defiant uplifting of her head:

"Yes, and of Gerald Halcombe. I intend to go back with you. Why should I not?"

"Because I wish you to remain here. But if you insist, it is not worth while disputing about it. I know my wishes will never influence you. If you go, you can but stay one day or night at the old place. It has been shut up so long, with only that deaf and dumb woman to take care of it, that I expect it is in a miserable state."

"I should not wish to remain there, Morris. I only want to pack up the few things I value."

"Very well. Get ready to start, for I go to-night."

During the journey husband and wife were nearer real friendliness than they had ever been. Dora was softened by thoughts of her father and home, and Morris

felt anew the old yearning to win his wife's heart, so that they were almost lover-like, he in his devotion to her comfort, she in her gratitude and gentleness, that accepted his attention graciously, though she could not give back the same intensity of regard.

They arrived at the old home in the gloaming of a dull December day, cold and tired. The door was opened by a dark-faced woman, who had a strange look of silent reserve.

Dora shrank nearer to Morris as she entered the house that was still and gloomy as a grave.

They went to the back drawing-room — a small one, more cozy than the others, but looking desolate and uncomfortable now its furniture was shrouded in holland, and the empty grate rusty from disuse. Morris turned up the gas and ordered the woman to get a fire and prepare supper for them at once.

Dora, tired and heartbroken at the unhomelike look of the place, sank into a chair by the French window that led into the garden.

There had been a slight fall of snow, and the garden had a weird, deserted look.

Her sad eyes scanned it dreamily. The sight of the familiar place recalled the old dreadful despairing heartache. A strange presentiment of evil weighed upon her. When she was alone she buried her face in her hands and wept as only the most heartbroken can weep.

Morris was directing the woman what to prepare for supper, so she wept on undisturbed.

Presently she arose and removed her hat, placing it beside her on the table, and loosened her long fur cloak, which, however, she did not take off because of the intense cold.

The fire spluttered, crackled, and smoked; the room looked ghostly; so Dora turned wearily to the outer

prospect, which was dreary in a lesser degree.

Morris came in, and seeing her look so desolate, put his arm about her waist and kissed her, saying he was going into the library to look through some papers, but would return to her directly their supper was prepared.

Dora still stood by the window, and thought long, aching thoughts of her dead lover. It was wicked, unwifely, weak, perhaps, but she could not help it.

Dora never knew how long she had stood there brooding over all the broken promise of her youth; but presently she saw a dark form that looked strangely familiar approach hastily, mount the moss-grown steps outside the window, and stand full in the light.

A stony horror held her like a death-clutch.

Then the man motioned her to open the window. She did so mechanically, and the icy air blew in upon her from her trance-like terror.

Gerald Halcombe, wan and white, stood before her, not, as she at first supposed, a pitying spirit that knew her heart's yearning for a sight of his cherished face, but in the flesh, a living, breathing man, full of mortal love and longing.

For a few seconds they stood mutely regarding each other. Dora did not scream or faint, but she tottered backward and leaned heavily against the table, her slender hands pressed upon her heart, her bewildered eyes beseechingly turned, full of the old love-light, upon her lover.

He was the first to speak. Holding out his arms, he said, in a tone of intense yearning:

"At last you have returned. Oh, my darling, where have you ben all this long time? I have searched for you many weary months, and have just returned almost despairing. Why do you shrink from me? My God! What has happened that, after all this long silence,

you have no welcome to give me? Speak, Dora, speak! Can't you see how miserable your silence makes me?"

He drew nearer and put his arms about her, pouring out a passionate protestation of undying love, and she lay on his heart and allowed his fierce caresses to loosen her frozen speech.

"Oh, Gerald, I thought you were dead. Thank Heaven you are restored to me, my love—my love, given back from the grave. How can I tell you all I feel at this meeting? How ill you look—how aged! Is it for love of me?"

She had forgotten in her new surprise and joy—forgotten all but the presence of the man who held her heart — forgotten Morris and her bitter bondage. So filled was she with joy that Gerald had great difficulty to make her explain why she though him dead.

Then all at once a light broke in upon him.

"Show me this paper that said I died," he cried hoarsely.

Dora, with shaking fingers, searched in a pocket-book, and showed him the paragraph.

Striding across the room, he held it to the pale light, and said in a tone of bitter conviction:

"I see through it all. This is an announcement of my father's death, but the eighty-three has been altered to thirty-three. I can guess who did this, and the motive. See, the first figure has been partly erased, a simple matter to so clever a man as Morris Hope. But answer, sweetheart—has his deceit served his turn so well as he wished? Have you been false to me?"

Then all the bitterness of her position was made clear to her, and Dora sank down at his feet and told him the history of the past year and all the misery it meant to them while life lasted.

When she said how Morris had won her to consent

to marriage with him, Gerald's dark, angry face grew livid. He lifted her hand and looked on the pledge she wore, then said in a stifled voice:

"Married! Morris Hope's wife! Married by fraud—tricked—deceived—yet still his wife and never mine. I shall not be! I will wrench my happiness from his unholy arms. You were mine first. He has no right to you. Oh, darling, this will drive me mad—I love you so!"

He lifted her in his strong arms and covered her face with passionate kisses.

He could not blame her, for he saw how she had been wearied into wedding the man of all others she least wanted as a husband.

She looked so ill, too, and suffering had altered her so that he could only feel intense love and pity for her. He kept all his anger for the man who had made the misery.

Wrath surged up like fire within him. Very bitter he felt must be the reckoning between them.

Even as this thought flashed through his maddened brain he lifted his eyes from the suffering face upon his breast and saw, standing in the open doorway, with a look of awful malice in his threatening eyes, Morris Hope.

In a voice hoarse and low with reined-in passion, Morris said:

"Dr. Halcombe, does it not strike you that it is rather a compromising position for a man to find his wife in? Release that lady; she is mine by all laws human and divine. If you do not do as I command, I will shoot you—on my soul I will."

Dora gave a cry of agony, and tried to struggle out of Gerald's arms.

He stooped his proud head before the pointed

weapon and kissed her passionately, then put her behind him and said, his blue eyes stormy, his looks fearless and resolute:

"Morris Hope, put down that pistol—you are not in Naples now."

He stepped nearer as he spoke, and continued:

"You have to answer to me for the blackest lie you ever spoke. I ask you, as man to man, how dared you entrap my betrothed wife into a marriage when her heart, her promise, were mine?"

Their eyes flashed answering fire; it was force met by force. Gerald, by a dexterous movement, snatched the pistol out of Morris's hand, and said fiercely:

"Men have died for less wrong than you have worked me."

Morris laughed a low, disdainful laugh, that forced new fire into Gerald's blood; his hold on the pistol tightened as the other said tauntingly:

"All is fair in love and war."

"Well, then, this is war," cried Gerald hotly, "and by Heaven I don't see why I should not shoot you."

"But I do, doctor; you fear to take my life more than I fear to lose it."

He met Gerald's eyes unflinchingly.

Dora saw her lover's hand raised, and the dangerous light of passion flash from his eyes, and she stepped between them, exclaiming:

"Gerald, give me that pistol. Morris, cease to taunt the man you have wronged. He does not fear to take your life—why should he more than he would fear to kill a treacherous reptile he saw in his path?

"But he will not stain his spotless honor with the crime of murder, nor offend his Creator by defacing His image, even though it be stamped on such a spurious coin as yourself.

"Don't speak. I know all you would say about wifely duty, but God will judge between us, and forgive me for forsaking the path marked out for wives.

"Loving one man, I cannot live with another. I will live out my life alone in honor and uprightness, but I will be free from the tie you have tricked me into—free to hide from the world, and wait till it please God to release me from the pain of living."

Gerald had allowed her to take the pistol from him; her utter despair affected him strangely.

He wondered Morris did not quail beneath the quiet scorn of her eyes that looked their loathing so plainly.

Dora turned from her husband to Gerald, and said with earnest pleading:

"Let me entreat you to leave us. You can do no good by staying here, and I feel as if the pain and perplexity of this discovery will kill me. Go now. I will see you once again, and tell you how this matter is settled between that man and me."

When Gerald had gone, Dora stood still looking after him till Morris's voice aroused her. She turned proudly and faced him, while he, trembling with rage, clutched her wrist and said savagely:

"What have you to say for yourself, madam? What explanation can you give me of this disgraceful scene?"

"I will give none. It explains itself. I can only say that I wish I had died ere I profaned my womanhood by becoming the wife of a liar, a coward, a cheat. I am not afraid of you. The worst you can work me is death, and that were welcome, since it would release me from you. Take the pistol—kill me: it would be kindness to finish the work you have begun, for to-day the best part of me has died.

"Take my money, leave me to starve—die in the street—do anything but try to force me to live with you, for that I swear I will not do. I would end my life by my own hand first."

Morris' anger got the better of his judgment.

"I will hold you to your duties as my wife. I want you to understand that thoroughly."

Dora laughed a mirthless mockery of laughter as she said:

"Why, it would be greater honor to be that man's slave than your wife. But you need not fear. I hold my own honor too sacred to let even love such as mine trample it into infamy. But it would be equal sin to live with a husband I detest, whose every touch fills me with loathing.

"No. I do not intend to disgrace my dead mother by the sin that seems easy to your coarse nature. I love Gerald too well to give him the right to despise me. Were my love and honor what you deem them, it might be possible for me to do so, that I might spite you, but I thank God for giving me too perfect a womanhood for the sin you have suggested."

"Fool, did I not hear that fellow say he would take you from me? But I will guard you as I have sworn to do. You can come to no disgrace with me."

"The only disgrace I have ever known is that of bearing your name. Can't you understand that after to-night's discovery it is impossible for me to be the same to you that I was before?"

"No. I cannot understand anything but that you are my wife, and that by law I can force duty from you, if not love. But come, get some supper. I am wearied to death with this absurd scene, and sick of your heroics. Come."

"I will not. You may kill me if you will, but never

more will I sit at the same table or sleep beneath the same roof with you. I have sworn it, and you shall see I can keep an oath as well as ever a Clyde did."

"Dora, you are mad. What can a weak woman do against such power as I hold? Come, a truce to this folly. You should be grateful that I have been so lenient with you. I will leave you here alone till you come to your senses."

He put the revolver in his pocket; he had been a great traveler, and was never without such a means of defence; then he went out, daring her to leave the room till his return, and saying he would give her an hour to think the matter over.

"Give me a year," she said disdainfully, "and I should think the same."

Morris went into the dining-room, drank a glass of brandy, and swallowed a mouthful of food, but it seemed to choke him. Then he bade the mute servant go to bed; he did not wish anyone to witness the struggle for supremacy between him and his wife.

He paced the room and brooded jealously over Dora's love for Gerald Halcombs, cursing the luck that had brought him back to England when he fancied he was safely out of it for months to come. Then he took another glass of brandy and another turn up and down the room.

Jealousy of his rival aroused all the smouldering fire of his fierce nature; the blood rushed from his heart to his head and made his brain reel.

"Why did I not send a bullet through his head, and swear I thought he was a burglar? He came on the worst of thefts—he tried to steal my honor."

The thought of Dora's passionate unrestrained love for this man maddened him. Hardly knowing what he did, he drank more brandy, then cursed the stupidity

that had led him to drink, and with unsteady feet followed his thoughts, which led him to the room in which he had left Dora. He opened the door quietly and looked in; the fire had flickered itself out.

When his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom he saw that the room was unoccupied. Next he turned his eyes to the window—it was not quite closed. Ah! Then she had gone—gone, and dared him to the uttermost. But here had she gone? To whom? Jealous love answered the question quickly.

With an oath he flung open the window and went out into the chill night air.

Chapter 337

THE MURDERED WIFE.

T WAS dark and dismal, not a star sent its light upon the scene. All was as black as the passion that was swelling in Morris Hope's heart. He stumbled on through the grounds to where the low wall divided them from the meadow that lay between them and his rival's house.

Lights flashed from the windows there, and in the gloom he dimly saw two figures just in front of him.

He drew back breathlessly; it was his wife's voice he heard saying sadly:

"No, Jane, you must go back without me. Tell Dr. Halcombe his must be the last shelter I should seek. I love and trust him, yet you know, dear old friend, what the world would say were I to seek shelter from my husband under that roof.

"To-night I shall stay in the harness-room over the stable, for I have sworn that the same roof shall not cover Morris Hope and me; and to-morrow I shall go to London and seek Mrs. Langley, then get my lawyer to arrange matters with my husband."

"Mrs. Langley, did you say, dearie? Why that is the name of the lady who is companion to Mrs. Howard, a friend of the master's sister, Miss Halcombe. I will go in and tell the doctor what you say, then return with some rugs and stay the night with you. I could not rest knowing you were alone and in trouble."

Dora watched her old nurse cross the meadow, then turned to go to the stables, when she was seized from behind and carried into the house.

It seemed a giant's strength that subdued her struggles, and stifled her outcries. Quickly Morris carried her up the steps and into the room he had recently left.

Half mad with rage and brandy, he threw her on the couch, then bolted the window afresh, and upbraided her furiously, declaring she had stolen away to go to her lover.

A fearful scene followed. Morris had lost all control over his evil temper, and Dora was enraged by his insults and violence — so enraged that her temper matched his, and she was distracted by the passion she could not master.

"You will drive me to go to Gerald Halcombe to seek refuge from your brutality. If you don't leave me in peace I will ask him to shelter me till I can find some other refuge from you—you madman!"

"By heaven! If you try to leave this house again to-night, I will kill you."

"Shoot me, then, for I shall try at once. Anything were better than being shut up with a maniac."

Shaking with excitemtn Dora went to the window, drew back the bolts, and threw it open.

"Come back if you value your life. Obey me, or I fire!"

A second later Dora fell headlong to the floor.

The insane rage that had mastered reason and led to this fearful deed died suddenly; Morris was sobered. In an agony of remorse he called upon her, lifting her tenderly and placing her upon the couch.

He bound up the wound, and tried to revive her by giving her brandy, but in vain; the light of those dear dark eyes was extinguished, the pale lips were parted, the ghastly pallor of the beautiful face changed not.

A sudden panic seized him. Surely she was not

dead!

Had he killed her? He, who, whatever his faults, yet loved her passionately.

"Why did she drive me to this? My wife, my darling!" he cried in agony.

Then he stooped and pressed a passionate kiss upon her lips, and rushed out into the night for help.

Where could he go. Dr. Halcombe's house was the nearest; the next was half a mile off. All enmity and hatred died out in this extremity. He would beg his rival to restore his darling to life.

His head reeled, he felt sick, and a strange sensation seized him as he climbed upon the wall; he was about to descend on the other side; when he turned faint and fell heavily to the ground.

When he opened his eyes, dawn was just breaking up the blackness of the night.

He was stiff with exposure to the cold.

All at once memory returned, and he recollected the horror of that terrible night's work.

With a mighty effort he rose to his feet, an agony of dread compelling him to hasten back, to that awful room. Outside the house, in the dim light, he halted and looked from the moss-grown steps to the window that, still ajar, showed the silent room beyond. A great shrinking horror made him stand still: he was no coward, yet he felt he dared not enter that room.

But after a desperate struggle, he forced himself to do so.

There was a little pool of blood by the window that riveted his attention, then he saw his wife's pretty hat.

He remembered he had bought it in Paris for her; still he dared not lift his eyes to find what his heart sought.

He could not at first compel his shrinking gaze to the place where he had laid the form of his girl-wife. But at last he mastered his emotion, lifted his eyes to the pier-glass which hung opposite the couch, and saw with a start of amazement that the couch was unoccupied.

No ghastly burden lay there to overwhelm him with remorse, but a stain, dark and dreadful to see, blotted the pillow.

He turned swiftly, and sought upon the floor with those shrinking eyes of his to see if the form of his victim had slipped from its resting-place. But no, it was not there. Where could she be? The pistol, too, which had been the cruel instrument of his anger was gone, but where?

A dark flush spread over his face as he thought that only one person would have entered the room during his absence, and that person was Jane.

But she could not have carried away the lifeless form of Dora, slight and frail as it was; she could, however, have got Gerald Halcombe to do it.

Hope sprang up in his heart that Dora might not have been mortally wounded after all, and that their attention might yet save her life.

He would go to them and pray for news of his wife; they might punish him as they would if they would only save him from this fearful crime of murder.

Oh, the madness of it! The awful soul-subduing thought that he had taken the life of the one of all others he was bound in all honor and manliness to cherish. So ready is weak human nature to find excuse for its frailties that he now attributed his frenzy to the brandy he had taken when excited and fasting.

Yet so eager was he for news of Dora that he forgot all else and hastened to Dr. Halcombe's. A feeble

winter sun sent out a cheerless ray as he knocked at the door; all the blinds were down, and the house looked quiet and undisturbed.

"What if she were not here," he thought, and shuddered.

Jane opened the door: she was white and haggard, and shrank back from him with a cry of terror.

The wretched man looked like one who had received a blow when she fled from him as from a pestilence. He entered the hall and waited till someone should come to him, his eyes shifting from place to place as though seeking something he dreaded to find.

Gerald Halcombe came out of his study, closing the door behind him softly; he tip-toed to where Morris stood, and beckoned him to follow into another room. When they entered Gerald pointed to a seat as far removed from him as possible, then said in a stern voice:

"You have come to look for your wife whom you so foully shot and left to die alone?"

"Oh! She did not die; say she did not die! Look at me! See how I suffer! I was mad with jealousy. She goaded me till I knew not what I did; then I flew out for you to help me to restore her, but lost my senses, and was unconscious till the dawn. If you are human you will not keep me in suspense—tell me of my wife."

"She is here, alive, but in immediate danger; she cannot survive, she is quite unconscious, and would have died before this if I had not found her as quickly as I did."

Morris Hope sank into the chair to which he had been motioned.

"Let me see her just once," he cried, hoarsely. "Believe me, though I did this awful thing, I loved her."

"Loved her! Such love as yours were worse than the cruellest hate. Stay there; for God's sake don't come

too near me, or I shall strangle you; the sight of you sets my blood on fire."

"Take me to my wife; who are you that you should judge me?"

"Who, indeed! Well, follow me; you shall see for yourself how serious this matter is."

Gerald led the way upstairs into a darkened room where Dora lay, white as the snowy pillows that supported her beautiful head. Her eyes were closed, and she looked calm and sweetly reposeful, as though she had already passed over that narrow division that separates sleep from death.

Morris sank down by the bedside and buried his face in his shaking hands.

Not a sound disturbed the intense quiet of the room till an hour later when Dora opened her eyes and moaned faintly.

The sound roused Morris. He bent over her.

"Dora," he said, eagerly, feverishly, "as you hope for mercy, say you forgive me; I was mad, darling, mad with jealous rage. God forgive me. I repented at once, child, and was seeking assistance when I fell and knew no more. For the sake of the love that has wrecked my life, speak to me."

Dora put out her hand to Gerald, who bent over her tenderly, and heard her whisper:

"Don't let him take me away. I want to die in your arms But the fault was as much ours as his. Promise you will secure him from the consequences of the evil deed when I am dead. Promise, for my sake, dear; then I shall die in peace."

Gerald drew back from the pleading eyes; seeing her suffering he could not find it in his heart to grant at once her request.

Morris broke in excitedly:

"Do not plead for me, Dora, I am not worth it. I do not fear my just punishment. Have you no word for me—you so tender-hearted, so forgiving. Can't you understand that I was mad!"

He was so humble, so penitent, so appealing, that Dora's tender heart melted, and with a faint smile she said with failing breath:

"I forgive you freely, but I cannot forgive myself for causing you to blacken your soul by this crime Leave me now, say good-bye, for I feel as if I should never look upon your face again. I am glad to go. You need not grieve for me, I fell quite happy and restful, only I am so sorry for you, so sorry."

Morris, with stifled sobs, bent over and kissed her damp forehead. As he raised himself he saw an awful change pass over the fair face. Gerald motioned him to keep silent, and bent over her anxiously. She lifted her shadowy eyes, and with his name upon her lips sank into sudden silence.

"Merciful God, she is dead!" Morris Hope groaned.

Gerald, white as the fair young face from which the light had suddenly gone, turned to him.

"You did your work well," he said hoarsely; "she has passed beyond your power for ever."

A strange exultation rang out in the condemning words; softly placing the sheet over the white face, he motioned Morris to precede him out of the room. At the threshold they met Jane, who shrank away from Hope with a look of fear, then at a word from Gerald flew sobbing into the room weher the child she had nursed with a mother's love lay deaf to her lamentation.

Gerald Halcombe stood in the room where he had learned to love Dora, the cozy sitting-room that old Mr. Clyde had used to the last. It looked dismal enough

now; the light was lighted, but no fire burned in the rusty grate.

Morris Hope, silent and sad-looking, stood with his elbow resting on the mantel-shelf; he had not taken food or drink since the night before, and was trembling with misery and weakness. The two men had been talking. Gerald appeared softened, but the resolute look never left his clear, steadfast eyes. Morris's were uncertainand shadowy, like those of one who had lost all hold on anything in life. He looked up at Gerald, and said in a low voice:

"I do not deserve such leniency; it would be better, perhaps, if you let justice take its course—a life for a life, you know."

"But I promised Dora I would never appear against you; besides, really the weak heart was the cause of death, not the wound; it was but a flesh wound, and though the operation of extracting the bullet was painful, it would not have caused death.

"Now, be reasonable; the deed is done. You are remorseful, penitent, and suffer, as it is right you should. Evil repented of is half atoned for. Come, forget we are enemies, and arrange about the funeral; it must be managed soon, you know. I'll give the certificate of death; say that Dora died of heart disease while on a visit to my house. Jane, who will do as I direct, and be discreet afterwards, can prove the death. The funeral must go from my house, and the coffin must be at once screwed down, in case anyone should notice the wound.

"Thank goodness there is no one in the house but Jane. I have sent the other servants away. Say you will be sensible, and leave everything in my management; it would be better for us all if you did. Come now, be sensible, man."

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